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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. SENGWE (Vice-Chairman)	(Zimbabwe)
later:	Mr. KALPAGE (Chairman)	(Sri Lanka)

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In the absence of Mr. Kalpage (Sri Lanka), Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/48/21 and A/48/407)

1. Mr. RIBEIRO (Brazil) associated himself fully with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77. The enhanced role of the United Nations in the field of international peace and security should not mean limiting its activities to peace-keeping operations to the detriment of long-term concerns such as economic and social development. The Department of Public Information was particularly well-suited for the advocacy of all United Nations activities.

2. The time had come to define United Nations public information policies by building on the consensus reflected in General Assembly resolution 45/76 A, particularly on the need to ensure a free flow of information and the role of international cooperation in redressing the imbalances among countries where communication was concerned.

3. In that connection, it should be noted that there were differences of opinion in the Committee between developed countries and developing countries. Developed countries supported ongoing cooperation activities in multilateral projects, while developing countries stressed the need to concentrate the resources of international cooperation on building infrastructures, human resources development and capacity-building. He therefore encouraged Member States to express their views so as to obtain the broadest spectrum of opinion, which would be the first step towards a future consensus on the matter.

4. His delegation welcomed the fact that the various changes which had taken place during the process of restructuring the Department had not modified its mission, which was to increase awareness of United Nations activities.

5. Concerning the question of United Nations information centres, the entire network should be reviewed, essentially to take into consideration the financial support provided by host countries and the centres' impact on public awareness of United Nations activities.

6. His delegation welcomed the fact that the question of interim offices was no longer on the agenda of the Committee on Information and was now a separate agenda item for the Second Committee at the forty-eighth session. As to the integration of 18 information centres with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices, it looked forward with interest to the requested report which would enable the effects of the integration on information activities to be assessed. While welcoming the creation of a consultative mechanism between the Secretariat and the representatives of regional groups, his delegation wished to point out that the mechanism was only of an advisory nature and must in no event become an organ which would jointly manage the Department's activities.

(Mr. Ribeiro, Brazil)

7. His delegation supported the draft decision on the enlargement of the Committee on Information, and was sure that Gabon and Israel would contribute in a positive way to the Committee's work.

8. Mr. KIM (Republic of Korea) said that in order to redress the imbalances and distortion of information flows between developed and developing countries, it was important to improve the capabilities of developing countries as soon as possible, to ensure the transfer of technology and to train personnel. United Nations agencies played a commendable role in that field.

9. His delegation hoped that multinational corporations would assist developing countries in improving their information infrastructure. It was also important to strengthen cooperation between developing countries in promoting overall information capability. The Republic of Korea had made substantial progress in the area of communications technology and was ready to share the benefits with other developing countries. It had been actively involved in the International Programme for the Development of Communication of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and had also contributed to the financing of other related UNESCO programmes.

10. Improving the dissemination of information was another important objective, and the United Nations should take the initiative in promoting the free flow of information in all countries and dealing impartially with information without distinction between developed and developing countries.

11. His delegation commended the broadcasting of United Nations radio programmes in 19 languages and their distribution to 1,700 networks throughout the world. It hoped that the programmes would also be produced in Korean, a language spoken by over 70 million people.

12. The United Nations should also enhance the dissemination of information by its field offices. In the Republic of Korea, the UNDP office had taken on the additional responsibilities of the United Nations information centre, but the numerous tasks it had to perform prevented it from devoting sufficient attention to information activities. His Government would study, together with the Department of Public Information, ways of more effectively disseminating information about the United Nations. The International Exposition at Taejon which was being held in the Republic of Korea from 7 August to 7 November 1993, provided an excellent opportunity for 10,000 daily visitors to the United Nations pavilion to learn about the history and activities of the Organization. The press had made spectacular progress in his country, and he stressed the importance accorded by the Republic of Korea to democracy and the freedom of the press, whose independence and pluralism must be respected.

13. In conclusion, he thanked the Under-Secretary-General for Public Information for the efforts he had made to revitalize the Department and assured him of his delegation's full support.

14. Mr. KHANAL (Nepal) said that he fully endorsed the statement of the Group of 77. With the revival of interest in the United Nations, it was inevitable that shortcomings due to resource constraints would become apparent to public opinion. The Department of Public Information was responsible for keeping

(Mr. Khanal, Nepal)

public opinion well informed of the numerous activities of the United Nations organization. Furthermore, the increasing involvement of the United Nations in complex peace-keeping missions had led some to suggest that the United Nations was today facing a crisis of too much credibility: keeping the public informed about what the United Nations could not do should be an equally important part of a public relations campaign.

15. The media should be kept well briefed on important activities of the United Nations, and his delegation welcomed the strengthening of relations with press agencies assigned to United Nations Headquarters, as well as the introduction of the new electronic information service. With the radio still the most important channel of communications in the least developed countries, his delegation had repeatedly urged the United Nations organization to include Nepali in the Department's radio programming.

16. Despite the need for rationalization, there were grounds for careful consideration of decisions relating to publishing activities, which should not be taken solely on the basis of cost criteria. Press releases, for example, were the only way that the media and smaller permanent missions could follow the activities of the United Nations, especially at a time when such activities were continuing to expand in the diverse fields of politics, economics and social issues.

17. His delegation supported the efforts to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library the most important instrument in maximizing the dissemination of United Nations information, and shared the concern of the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information regarding the impact of security-related decisions.

18. The plan for the integration of the United Nations information centres should not be at the cost of their functional autonomy. It would be advisable to redeploy the scarce resources allocated to centres in developed countries to those of developing countries.

19. His delegation attached great importance to freedom of the press, as well as to the free flow of information. It was necessary to strengthen and improve the means and infrastructures of communications and to promote training and the dissemination of information in developing countries, in order to narrow the gap between them and developed countries. The situation was particularly serious in the least developed countries, and DPI and UNESCO should therefore work in close cooperation in order to close that gap.

20. Mr. OUEDRAOGO (Burkina Faso) fully endorsed the statement by the Group of 77. He was, however, astonished at the way in which certain decisions had been taken, particularly concerning the establishment, integration into UNDP offices, and the closure of information centres, as well as the elimination of posts.

21. In the course of an informal briefing session, his delegation had been surprised to learn that the Ouagadougou Centre was among the integrated centres, although it did not appear among the 18 centres listed in paragraph 7 of document A/AC.198/1993/7 nor had it received, as had those centres affected by

(Mr. Ouedraogo, Burkina Faso)

the measure, the letter outlining the guiding principles of the integration operation.

22. After explaining the background to the Ouagadougou Centre, which also served Mali, Niger and Chad, and describing his Government's efforts to facilitate its functioning, he said that the Centre's previously flourishing activities had slowed down when its Director had been recalled in April 1991. The Director of the UNDP office was temporarily occupying the post, which remained vacant, but had little contact with the Centre, which, with its three staff, was coping as best it could. The absence of a Director had an impact on relations with the Government and on the credibility of the Centre, and had led to a loss of contact with the public in the countries it served. Furthermore, the Centre was suffering from a lack of supplies and documentation.

23. His delegation wished to know what DPI intended to do with the P-4 post of director of the Ouagadougou Centre provided for in the 1992-1993 budget, and to be informed as to the actual status of the Centre itself. In addition, he sought clarification concerning the criteria which DPI applied in determining the granting of priority to certain centres over others.

24. Mr. MALASCHENKO (Ukraine) said that the General Assembly and DPI should constantly strive to redress the imbalance which existed in the field of mass dissemination of information. It was understandable that developing countries should also demand the right to inform the international community of their needs, concerns, opinions and aspirations, as well as to make known their cultural values and achievements. The same applied to the countries in transition, of which Ukraine was one. In that respect the transition from a totalitarian system of information to the creation of a new order founded on democratic principles was successfully under way in Ukraine. His delegation thanked all the international funds and bodies as well as States and individuals, who were helping it set up new national media. As was the case in a number of other countries, Ukraine was encountering a number of problems caused by the imbalance in the exchange of information. The national media were faced with the expansion of powerful information structures against which they could not compete without the necessary infrastructure, materials, modern technology and qualified personnel. That imbalance could be considerably reduced if the world-wide information systems took more interests in other countries and peoples and gave them coverage not only in the case of newsworthy events but in a regular and objective manner. His delegation hoped that the resolutions to be adopted at the current session would aim at strengthening the activities of United Nations bodies and other regional and international organizations with a view to giving all possible assistance to developing countries and countries in transition in redressing those imbalances. It should be stressed that in the absence of a just information order, the world was culturally impoverished.

25. His delegation fully supported the energetic efforts made recently by the United Nations, and DPI in particular, to reorganize activities in the field of information. The report of the Committee on Information on the work of its fifteenth session (A/48/21) reported substantial improvements and described interesting plans and prospects. His delegation welcomed that approach, and

(Mr. Malaschenko, Ukraine)

hoped that it would result in concrete achievements. Particular emphasis should be placed on the efforts pertaining to information on peace-keeping operations. Such information should not only include material on troop operations, but should also discuss, when it arose, the issue of economic sanctions. Ukraine, like other countries, was particularly affected by the economic sanctions taken against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: the international community should be duly informed of that situation, and such information should be taken into account in the apportionment of international aid and the granting of subsidies.

26. In the context of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, his delegation had proposed the organization of a world conference on the development of mankind in the twentieth century which would also highlight the prospects for the forthcoming millennium. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Ukrainian and Belarusian request for the drawing up and implementation of a system-wide programme commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster had been favourably received by the delegations of other countries. It was of the utmost importance that that tragic event should not be forgotten, and the conduct of a large-scale information campaign on the subject would help ensure that such a disaster never repeated itself.

27. With regard to interim United Nations offices, experience showed that the opening of such an office at Kiev had effectively enabled the Ukrainian people to be informed about the aims, principles, work and achievements of the Organization. Moreover, that office made it possible to disseminate objective information on the processes under way in Ukraine. The integration of information and technical activities in United Nations field offices improved efficiency and substantially reduced upkeep costs.

28. His delegation shared the view that it was time to modify the process of formulating General Assembly resolutions on the report of the Committee on Information, which were full of pompous rhetoric and were rehashed from session to session. That practice should be abolished; resolutions should be shorter, more informative and more focused on solving real problems. His delegation also supported the proposal to shorten the sessions of the Committee on Information and increase the number of consultations between sessions.

29. Mrs. ZHANG Qiyue (China) stated that information was an important part of the work of the United Nations. At a time when the international situation was undergoing profound changes and the role of the United Nations was widely recognized, it was all the more necessary to do a good job in the field of information.

30. Her Government believed that the establishment of a new international political and economic order should be founded on the five principles of peaceful coexistence and on recognition of the diversity of the world, which was made up of some 180 sovereign States. Those States differed not only in terms of social systems or levels of development, but also in ideology, cultural tradition, national character and religious belief. Only by respecting diversity, promoting mutual exchanges and opposing the imposition of a specific model would it be possible to identify principles acceptable to all countries which could serve as norms for international relations.

(Mrs. Zhang Qiyue, China)

31. The establishment of a new international information and communication order which was more just, equitable and efficient could not be separated from the establishment of a new international political and economic order. In that regard, she commended the enormous work carried out by the Department of Public Information in the areas of peace-keeping and economic and social development. She believed that at the present time, when peace and development were the twin major issues facing all nations, the role of the Department of Public Information should essentially consist of identifying the establishment of a new international information and communication order based on recognition of diversity and respect for differences among nations. In that regard, priority consideration should be given to the needs of the developing countries, including the strengthening of their information structure, so as to eliminate the present imbalance in the field of information. The Department should reinforce North-South cooperation and exchanges among countries, particularly through its publications. It should also disseminate information about the United Nations to enable people to learn about its achievements, tasks and existing problems. It was only in that way that the United Nations could become an organization universally supported by all countries and could strengthen its role and enhance its credibility.

32. The integration of United Nations information centres with other United Nations offices should be the subject of further study. In her delegation's view, the information function of the merged offices should also be evaluated, since opinions on the matter were varied.

33. China attached great importance to various events which the United Nations would organize over the next few years, such as the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in 1994, the World Summit for Social Development, the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, and in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995. She hoped that the Department of Public Information would identify those events as priorities and contribute to their success.

34. Mr. ALLO (Gabon) drew attention to the role and responsibility of information in a setting where life and society were undergoing rapid change world wide. In the current system, the unequal, biased and increasingly global media coverage of international events, assisted by technical communication methods in which the developing countries were not proficient, merely accentuated the existing imbalances in the field of information. The result was that, in most regions of the world, peoples were simply media ghettos. Particularly in Africa, the right of peoples to express their concerns, report facts relevant to them and present their own culture was still by no means exercised in a satisfactory manner. In addition, far from being able to play their full part in the history of the world, those peoples were reduced to mere objects in a history where certain countries were portrayed as being equipped with the scientific capabilities and technology essential for modern communication.

35. Strong encouragement should therefore be given to action by the United Nations system in that area and to South-South cooperation. That cooperation, when in the form of the activities of the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries and the Broadcasting Organization of Non-Aligned Countries, was

(Mr. Allo, Gabon)

contributing to the establishment of a new world information and communication order based on the common aspirations and interests of the developing countries.

36. The ministers of information of the non-aligned countries, meeting recently at Pyongyang, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, had called on both non-aligned and developing countries to continue to seek ways of increasing the dissemination of information, including the instituting of various forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. They had recommended the establishment of international information centres on different continents with a view to disseminating information on the situation in their countries. They had requested the non-aligned countries to explore the possibility of putting into orbit a LANSAT communication satellite, which would transmit more accurate information world wide and present a more balanced picture of the developing countries.

37. Gabon, which endorsed the fundamental principles of freedom of information, expression and opinion, now had 20 newspapers, 3 national television and radio stations, 1 private television and radio station belonging to the opposition party, and a Pan-African commercial radio station known as Africa No. 1. Any initiative favouring cooperation between the Department of Public Information and Africa No. 1, which had powerful transmitters, would be welcome.

38. In many developing countries, information centres were often the sole source of information about international politics and the United Nations. They also served as good research libraries. In that context, the Gabonese Government firmly hoped that a United Nations information centre would be opened in Libreville.

39. Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia), speaking on behalf of the five States members of the Arab Maghreb Union - Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia - noted the growing importance of the role of information in the new international arena. The successes of the United Nations in many different areas could not be properly appreciated unless there was sustained action directed at international public opinion. In that regard, the unequal treatment given in the international media to various aspects of peace-keeping operations illustrated the danger of distorted perception on the part of international public opinion with respect to the real scope of those operations. The Department of Public Information should therefore be vigilant in ensuring that media coverage was given to United Nations peace-keeping operations in their entirety and that information on the military, political, humanitarian and economic aspects of those operations was carefully balanced.

40. There were other fields of action where information played a key part, such as economic and social development. The role of information should therefore be directed increasingly at making the public more aware of the need to redress the imbalances which characterized international economic relations and mitigate the impact of indebtedness, which burdened the economy of many countries in the South and held back their development. Africa, in particular, was suffering from an acute deterioration in the terms of trade, reeling under the impact of the aftermath of war, such as mines, and subjected to natural disasters such as drought and desertification. Particular attention should therefore be accorded in the field of information to the follow-up and implementation of the

(Mr. Abdellah, Tunisia)

objectives of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/151 of 18 December 1991.

41. The task of economic integration, which was being carried out by regional groupings of countries of the South, would also benefit from a higher profile. For example, the concepts of a multidimensional partnership, especially in economic matters, and of joint development in the context of solidarity links between the Arab Maghreb Union and the European Community deserved the attention of United Nations information structures with a view to helping them become a reality.

42. The consensus which had been reached in the Committee on Information paved the way for action to intensify the free flow of information and to reduce disparities between developed and developing countries. In order to redress the imbalance in the field of information, modern communications technology infrastructures must be set up in developing countries so that they might express their opinions, achievements and hopes in the international media and increase awareness of their values and cultures.

43. The protection of journalists in the performance of their duties was also an important factor in encouraging and consolidating the freedom of the press. Therefore, the competent United Nations services should make every effort to make the public more aware of the need to protect information providers throughout the world.

44. The countries of the Arab Maghreb Union reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations information centres and considered it necessary to enhance their effectiveness and direct their activities to priority areas. To that end, the human and material resources at their disposal should be bolstered.

45. Mr. KAWAI (Japan) said that the United Nations was at a critical juncture in its history. The end of the cold war had created both opportunities and challenges for the United Nations, particularly in the area of information, since the increased number of peace-keeping operations had made the timely dissemination of objective information an absolute necessity in order to mobilize public support. Information activities to heighten public awareness of the role of United Nations missions could contribute to their success, as the example of Cambodia demonstrated. Japan commended particularly the work of the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General in explaining the Secretary-General's positions.

46. The flexibility of the Department of Public Information needed to be improved so that it could move financial resources and personnel into priority areas, which were currently peace-keeping and peacemaking, promotion of human rights, humanitarian assistance and development.

47. It was crucial for the Department of Public Information to formulate a strategy in cooperation with the bodies of the United Nations system, to prepare the major conferences to be held under the Organization's auspices, such as the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development.

(Mr. Kawai, Japan)

48. His delegation had noted in draft resolution B, which the Committee on Information had recommended for adoption by the General Assembly, the decision of the Department to establish a task force to look into the allocation of office space to the media at United Nations Headquarters. It was a matter of urgency that the Department should find an appropriate solution to the problem, which had existed for too long. As the Japanese media organizations did not have the working space they needed, they considered that they had been treated unfairly, their requests having had no effect.

49. His delegation shared the Assistant Secretary-General's concern about information concerning the suspension of guided tours at Headquarters. It was important to find a solution compatible with security restrictions, so that the public might visit the Organization which worked to serve the peoples of the world.

50. Freedom of expression and the free flow of information were essential for democracy. In that field, Japan had supported the two seminars organized jointly by the Department of Public Information and UNESCO at Windhoek, Namibia and Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. Japan was aware that efforts were needed to strengthen training in the media sector in many developing and newly independent countries. It provided technical and financial assistance in the telecommunications sector, organized training courses in Japan and sent experts to developing countries. In addition, the Japanese Government had committed $545 million of government aid to telecommunications projects in developing countries.

51. Japan urged the Member States to back the Committee's recommendation to accept the applications of Gabon and Israel to become members of the Committee.

52. The United Nations must take account of the fast-moving development of modern media and their immense influence on world public opinion and the behaviour of policy-makers. It must mobilize public support for its expanding activities and adjust to the rapidly changing international environment.

53. Mr. Kalpage (Sri Lanka) took the Chair.

54. Mr. AL-ASSOUSSI (Kuwait) said that the report of the Committee on Information contained valuable recommendations. Given the essential role played by the Department of Public Information in the currently evolving world, Member States must pay their contributions so that it could carry out its mandate. In the field of communications, the technological gap between developed and developing countries kept on growing. Kuwait wished to associate itself with the request made by some developing countries to the Department of Public Information and UNESCO to redouble their efforts with a view to establishing a new world information and communication order which would encourage information flows and end the monopoly in that field.

55. Kuwait hoped that the Department of Public Information would continue its publications on United Nations activities in cooperation with departments of other bodies.

(Mr. Al-Assoussi, Kuwait)

56. Communication was essential to ensure the stability of the international community and good-neighbourliness between States. Although Kuwait continued to suffer the consequences of Iraq's brutal invasion, the flow of information had been restored there owing to freedom of the press and freedom of expression which were guaranteed under the Constitution. In that respect, his delegation supported those delegations who had voiced their countries' concern at the negative influence of the mass media of other States, which threatened their cultures. Kuwait's very existence continued to be menaced by the actions of the Iraqi regime which used the official mass media to disseminate false information and mendacious allegations, particularly with regard to its historic rights over Kuwait, which Iraq referred to as its nineteenth Governorate, which had the effect of poisoning Iraqi public opinion and destabilizing the region. Kuwait had denounced that policy and provided irrefutable proof of Iraq's doings to the Security Council. Kuwait reaffirmed its willingness to cooperate with the United Nations bodies to reach common goals.

57. Mr. AL-NIMA (Iraq), exercising his right of reply, said that the representative of Kuwait, unlike those who had spoken before him, rather than limiting himself to the agenda item under discussion, had deliberately raised another complex issue that had already been the subject of several resolutions. The Government of Kuwait was thereby attempting to ensure that the embargo against Iraq - the effects of which the Iraqi people had been experiencing for the past three years - was maintained. Kuwait feared the future because it was harbouring illusions and not facing the facts.

58. Mr. AL-ASSOUSSI (Kuwait) reiterated that the Iraqi regime was using its mass media against Kuwait and the international community. He had mentioned in his statement only facts, which the delegate of Iraq had been careful not to address. He stated further that Kuwait was not seeking a vote on a resolution regarding that issue.

59. Mr. REYES-MATTA (Chile) fully supported the position of the Group of 77, as set forth by the Colombian delegation. However, he hoped that the Department of Public Information would establish better cooperation with the Committee on Information when dealing with questions of a political nature.

60. Referring to United Nations strategies in the field of information, he stressed that the end-users of the Department's services should be men and women from around the world, and that the information should not be targeted merely at the mass media and Governments. For example, university students and journalists throughout the world should have access to United Nations databases in order to conduct research into their fields of study. All individuals should have access to United Nations information by telephone or via computers. Schools, which were training the future citizens of the world, should all be provided with copies of the Charter of the United Nations and should have programmes on the United Nations and its work.

61. With regard to the relationship between enterprise and information, it should not be forgotten that ideas and concepts were the Organization's greatest asset in the field of information. Ideas could attract resources, presented along with the other main idea of the end of the century: the global enterprise or global society. The Organization should define a set of strategic objectives

(Mr. Reyes-Matta, Chile)

for its work between now and the year 2000 for the global society of the end of the century. Furthermore, there was a trend in the North and the South alike towards diversity and towards specialized information targeted at specific segments of society. That should serve as a reference for the type of information offered by the United Nations. In conclusion, he hoped that the draft resolutions submitted by the Committee on Information would lead to original projects in keeping with a world that sought new parameters for the future.

62. Mr. NYAMIKEH (Ghana) said that the cold war and ideological conflicts had, in the past, hampered the work of the Organization, in particular with regard to the establishment of a new world information and communication order. While social and economic development had benefited from advancements in information and communication technology, those new technologies had not been made available to the developing countries. Changes within the international system had provided new opportunities for development centred on the individual. Over the past two years, the United Nations had shown that it had an irreplaceable role to play in the service of humanity. Global agendas were being developed on cross-sectoral issues and consensus was being shaped on a myriad of issues, within the context of human-centred development.

63. In the field of information, it was high time to transfer information and communication technologies so that they could benefit the underprivileged of the world. Indeed up-to-date information was essential to the implementation of economic reforms. People needed to be informed about democratic reforms and their rights and responsibilities. As a complement to the agenda for development that was to be submitted to the General Assembly at its current session, the Committee on Information should establish an agenda for the transfer of information and communication technologies within the United Nations system, which would take full account of existing networks to avoid duplication.

64. While progress had been achieved regarding the question of apartheid and that of Palestine, apartheid had not yet been dismantled and the Declaration of Principles between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel was just a beginning. Public information efforts at eliminating apartheid and improving the situation of Palestine refugees should be enhanced.

65. His delegation did not oppose integrating United Nations information centres with the field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, but it did regret that the issue had not been brought before the Committee for a final decision. No decision should be taken on the matter until the General Assembly had considered it at its forty-eighth session.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.